

REMARKS CONCERNING THE PROFESSORSHIP OF SURGERY,

AND

PRIVATE LECTURERS;

ADDRESSED TO THE

PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS

OF THE

Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh.

BY

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REMARKS, &c.

IN the last Number of the *Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal*,* Dr DUNCAN junior says, “ It is important to remark, that the President of the Royal College of Surgeons is also at the head of another, and in some respects rival, school of professional education.”

Much as I respect Dr DUNCAN’s judgment, I cannot concur with him in the above remark. For after considering the subject deliberately, I have not been able to discover any good reason for representing the President of the College of Surgeons as the head of a rival Medical School, since the College of Surgeons has established only a single Class, on a subject intimately connected with their own department of prac-

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tice, and at a time when no corresponding class existed in the University. All the Surgery then taught in the University consisted of Thirty Lectures, delivered by Dr MONRO, as an appendix to his Course of Anatomy. Surgery, therefore, in this mode of proceeding, was treated as a branch of secondary importance. But the College of Surgeons, entertaining far other views respecting the importance and usefulness of Surgery, and respecting the necessity of affording the Students an opportunity of learning all the Doctrines of Surgery, together with all the minutiae of operations, more completely in detail, conceived the idea of establishing a Professorship of the Principles and Practice of Surgery, to be taught by a practical Surgeon. The sole motive of the College for establishing this Professorship, was to insure the regular delivery of a full course of Surgical Lectures, by binding their Professor, on his appointment, to deliver annually a Course of Surgery, as long as the Winter Courses delivered in the University by the Medical Professors. And, to remove all ambiguity on this point, it was specially enacted, that the Professor should lecture without interruption for Five Months, at the rate of Five Lectures a-week.

In all these proceedings of the College there was nothing hostile to the University ; neither did the conduct

of the College in a single instance betray the smallest tendency to an illiberal interested corporation spirit ; since attendance upon a course of Surgery, delivered by a Professor in the University, or by a fellow either of the College of Physicians or of the College of Surgeons, equally qualifies the candidate to present himself for examination.

If the denomination of Rival School be intended to include all the Private Lecturers who teach various branches of Medicine in Edinburgh, it ought to be recollected, that several of those lecturers are Members of the College of Physicians, and that even over those among them who are Fellows of the College of Surgeons the President has not any control. He cannot, therefore, with any propriety, be regarded as the head of this very useful body of men. But waving any objection to the designation, I am inclined to entertain a very different view of the subject, and to regard the Private Lecturers rather as auxiliaries than as rivals to the parent Seminary. To take anatomical instruction as an example, since there are five Lecturers on Anatomy Fellows of the College of Surgeons. The first point to ascertain, is the number of students whom a single individual has a reasonable prospect of instructing in the various branches of Anatomy with sufficient accuracy, to enable

him to perform the operations of surgery with intelligence and safety. I cannot pretend to determine this point with absolute certainty, while I am confident that no single individual, however industrious, or however able, could do justice to 700 students at one time. Now, according to the most accurate information which I have been able to obtain, there are above 700 students at present in Edinburgh, attending the different Lecturers on Anatomy. The Professor of Anatomy could not alone teach so great a number of Students. The excess, therefore, above what he could teach personally, must be taught by other anatomists. And it is a most fortunate circumstance for Edinburgh, that so great a number of able and well informed lecturers should have arisen in the College of Surgeons, to lend their assistance in teaching this most important branch of medical education. For, without presuming to place the Private Lecturers on a level with the learned Professor in the University, I have not any hesitation in asserting, that every one of them is perfectly qualified to teach Anatomy in a most excellent manner. Some of them have, by their publications, already made themselves most creditably known to the medical world, and have obtained a reputation far beyond the limits of Scotland. The exertions of the Private Lecturers, therefore, supply a deficiency which otherwise would have existed with regard to anatomical

instruction, the foundation of all medical science. And a knowledge of this deficiency would have prevented a certain class of students from coming to Edinburgh for a medical education.

It is not, however, merely as Lecturers on Anatomy, that the exertions of those gentlemen are a support to the University. Since, besides lecturing, every one of them has opened a dissecting-room for the purpose of giving instruction in Practical Anatomy. I need hardly observe, that a student cannot reasonably expect to be a good anatomist, unless he dissect a great deal himself. Influenced by the same view of the subject, the College of Surgeons enacted a regulation, to compel every candidate for a diploma to attend a course of Practical Anatomy. The number of students who attended the dissecting-rooms last winter was very great. I can state, from information which I am confident is very nearly correct, that there were at least three hundred students of Practical Anatomy. And I very much question, whether the Professor of Anatomy could undertake to teach this very important branch of medical education, on account of the drudgery and consumption of time requisite to do justice to so great a number of students. For the Professor requires leisure to prosecute the study of Anatomy with a view to improvement, in order that he may

keep pace with the discoveries which are perpetually making, and thereby maintain the high character and reputation for knowledge which becomes his dignified situation. The assistance, therefore, which the University receives from the Private Lecturers in teaching Anatomy, is, in my opinion, very great, and contributes essentially to support the high reputation of Edinburgh as a seminary for Medical Education.

The Private Lecturers on Chemistry, also contribute most essentially to promote the prosperity of the University, without affecting the interest of the Professor of Chemistry, provided he has knowledge, abilities, and industry, to discharge the duty of his chair in a creditable manner. Nothing can more powerfully illustrate the security with which such a professor may bid defiance to the rivalship of the most formidable competitors, than the success of the present distinguished Professor soon after the commencement of his academical career at Edinburgh. He then had to contend with two rivals of very superior talents, Dr THOMAS THOMSON, the present celebrated Professor of Chemistry at Glasgow, and the late Dr JOHN MURRAY, a most eloquent and popular lecturer. Now, what was the result of this formidable rivalship? Did Dr HOPE's progress to eminence suffer the smallest retardation or abatement? In my opinion it did not.

On the contrary, I am persuaded that his success has been greater, in consequence of the effect which the reputation of those two respectable chemists had in raising the character of Edinburgh as a school of Chemistry. Both of them had written Systems of Chemistry, which were well received by the public. This test of their chemical knowledge extended their fame to a distance, and served to attract an influx of students, from remote quarters of the country to a seminary where so many excellent courses of chemistry were given. The Professor in the University naturally derived an advantage from this additional influx of students more than sufficient to compensate any trifling loss which he sustained by a few individuals choosing to attend one of his rivals. The industry, too, of a Professor in the University is always more completely insured, when he is under the necessity of making perpetual exertions to secure himself from the inroads and encroachments of active Private Lecturers.

In another department of Chemistry also, which did not in the least interfere with the Lectures delivered by the Professor, the University is beholden to a Fellow of the College of Surgeons, for his exertions to afford the students an opportunity of acquiring practical knowledge in Chemistry. A few years ago, Dr FYFE opened

classes for Practical Instruction in Chemistry and Pharmacy, which he conducted in a most masterly manner.* The attempt was most meritorious, as every one acquainted with the extent and complexity of chemical science, must be aware of the impossibility of a student retaining a distinct impression of the multifarious substances, and processes, and chemical phenomena, unless they are repeatedly presented to his notice under circumstances which afford him an opportunity of examining every thing at leisure, and to his complete satisfaction.

The establishment of these practical courses was obviously a most valuable addition to the Chemistry before taught in Edinburgh. The Professor, it is evident, has not time to superintend such a course himself. But Dr HOPE being convinced of its utility, has, very much to his honour, encouraged his assistant Mr LONGSTAFF to undertake a similar course. The value of practical instruction in Chemistry, is daily becoming better known, and more highly appreciated. All the students who have attended those courses, are fully convinced of the very great advantage which they have derived from them. So that now there is every reason to

* Dr FYFE's example has been followed by Dr TURNER, who has delivered several Practical Courses of Chemistry and Pharmacy of great merit, as indeed might have been anticipated from his extensive and accurate knowledge of the subject, and his distinguished abilities as a Lecturer.

expect, that, in the course of a few years, a knowledge of practical Chemistry will be much more generally cultivated, to the great benefit of the parties, and to the manifest advantage of the University, in whose reputation all improvements made in the medical education of Edinburgh ultimately merge. This general tendency of all improvements to converge towards the University as a focus of attraction, is but a just retribution for the obligation which the Private Lecturers owe to the meritorious and successful exertions of the Professors, who have raised the reputation of Edinburgh to so great a height as a seminary of medical education. The Professors and the Private Lecturers are mutually interested in promoting the general prosperity of the University. And while so large a concourse of medical students continues to flock to Edinburgh, every Lecturer on Medicine, whether public or private, who has merit to deserve encouragement, will be certain to receive it.

CONCERNING APPRENTICES.

A well conducted apprenticeship is of inestimable value to a Student of Medicine, by communicating practical knowledge and practical habits, which prepare him to exercise his profession with credit to himself, and advantage to the public. For, as a large proportion of the

knowledge requisite to practise Medicine with success, is the result of observation and experience, a student cannot too early be placed in a situation to begin the acquisition of it. Now, an apprenticeship to an experienced practitioner, affords every facility of improvement in a great degree of perfection. The patients of the master provide an ample field for observation, which the apprentice cultivates to the greatest advantage, by having, at the commencement of his studies, his attention directed to the objects the most worthy of notice, which he is capable of understanding. The instructions of the master are of the greatest importance in this instance, since, from the complicated nature of the subject, the obscurity of many symptoms, and the delicacy and accuracy of observation requisite for substantial improvement, an apprentice would otherwise overlook many circumstances essential for him to note and to remember. And being thus early introduced to an acquaintance with the appearance and habits of the sick, he learns to investigate a case in a more satisfactory manner, and to describe it with more distinctness. The necessity, too, which the apprentice is under of making regular reports to his master, obliges him to acquire habits of attention and accuracy, which modify his character, and ultimately make him a more intelligent and judicious practitioner.

All the above advantages are the obvious consequences of placing a young man under the superintendance of an intelligent practitioner, provided sufficient attention is, at the same time, paid to have him instructed in the scientific principles of his profession. This, therefore, should be a principal object with the superintendant of his education, and is by no means incompatible with the prosecution of his practical pursuits. On the contrary, the knowledge of diseases which he acquires at the bedsides of patients, qualifies him to benefit more completely from attendance upon lectures, and from the perusal of books. The practical and scientific branches of his education may therefore be carried on together with the greatest advantage.

Another great benefit of an apprenticeship is the opportunity which it affords the apprentice of becoming familiarly acquainted with the appearance, sensible qualities, preparations, and doses of medicines; a department of knowledge which it is of the greatest advantage to acquire at the outset of life, before the mind is distracted by attention to a variety of important objects.

The above exposition sufficiently displays the advantage of serving an apprenticeship to an attentive intelligent experienced practitioner, who will be careful to

teach the apprentice habits of industry and attention, to instruct him in all the points of practice suited to his capacity, to direct and superintend his studies, and to examine him with regard to the progress which he has made in his professional pursuits. But, the apprentice, to enjoy the full benefit of his apprenticeship in rendering his education perfect, should reside at the seat of a Medical School, where, during the currency of his indentures, he will have an opportunity of attending Lectures on every subject connected with Medicine.



